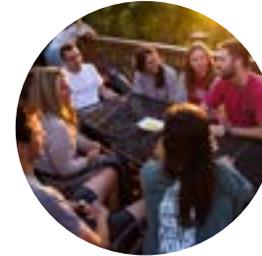


Catholic and were hungry to know the Lord. The women from that Bible study are some of my closest friends to this day, and that may have never happened if I didn't introduce my faith into those friendships.

12. What does putting God first in your life look like? How could you do this this week?

Response: Let the group discuss.



Chapter III

Sex

CHAPTER 3

SEX

Goal: Awakening an Awareness to God's Plan for Sex

Leader's Guide:

The past two weeks, we've looked closely at our human nature and the Christian nature of relationships. With these valuable foundations, the next few weeks we're going to apply some of these principles and the Gospel message to a few specific areas that are common in Greek life: sex, alcohol, success, and time.

Last week, we talked specifically about ordered relationships, and how God is our ultimate source of fulfillment. We are made for relationship, and especially for a relationship with God, who is love. Often, we feel this truth about our nature most when it comes to the desire for romantic relationships – we desire to be known in deep ways, and we look to fulfill this desire through romantic relationships. However, we also know how quickly these relationships can become sources of pain, confusion and hurt.

Our desire for love and for meaningful relationships gets even more complicated when sex enters the picture. Though our culture loves to sell us the narrative of casual sex, that sex with “no strings attached” is

healthy and even a rite of passage, many young people have first-hand experience that this narrative does not lead to being more fully alive but often leaves us even more broken.

In this chapter, we're going to look at God's vision for sex established in Genesis and how that vision becomes twisted through sexual sin. We'll also look at some Scripture passages that reveal God's true vision for marriage as something we can strive for as we live out our Christian faith and identity. Though these visions may be difficult to reconcile with the brokenness around us in our culture today, we know that we can rely on God's grace and the sacraments to guide us to living out romantic relationships with freedom and virtue.

For you as the leader, it is good to be aware that this might be the first conversation that your participants have had on sex and how it is designed to be used. This can be an extremely sensitive topic, and we encourage you to approach this study with patience and prudence as participants begin to unpack their experience and their potentially distorted views of the sexual embrace. Invite your participants to share about their experience without encouraging over-sharing or directly calling out your participants. We also encourage you to initiate follow-up conversations with the individuals in your group after the study as you support them in the healing process and invite them to greater freedom.

Remember: This chapter will only scratch the surface of God's vision for sex and meaningful relationships. Consider checking out the “Cultural Apologetics” series or the “Theology of the Body” Bible study on FOCUS Equip to dive more deeply into this topic.

Introduction: Identity and Sex

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

Last week, we talked specifically about ordered relationships and how God is our ultimate source of fulfillment. We are made for relationship, and especially for a relationship with God, who is love. Often, we feel this truth about our nature most when it comes to the desire for romantic relationships – we desire to be known in deep ways, and we look to fulfill this desire through romantic relationships. However, we also know how quickly these relationships can become sources of pain, confusion and hurt.

Fortunately for us, God has revealed to us his vision for sex and relationships that will lead us to greater unity with him, ourselves, and others. God is not anti-sex; rather, he views it as so sacred and important to who we are as human beings that we must be careful to treat it with the reverence it deserves. Sex, as God has designed it, can reveal to us incredible truths about the infinite and eternal love we all desire and are created for.

1. What do you know about what the Catholic Church teaches about sex? What do you think God thinks about sex and relationships?

*Response: Let the group discuss. Some follow-up questions include:
How have you been taught the Catholic Church's teaching on sex?
Are there any questions you have or teachings you don't understand?
Where else do you look for the truth about sex?*

Let's once again return to Genesis, to the story of Adam and Eve, to see what our creation can tell us about God's design for sex.

(Read Gen. 1:26 – 28, 2:24.)

2. What do these passages tell us about God's view of sex? What is its purpose?

Response: Sex is rightly designed by God as an act within marriage between a man and a woman for the purposes of unity of the couple and for procreation. It is meant to be a participation in union with God and one another and participation with God in creation by populating the earth. Sex is an invitation into the love and the creative power of God!

(Read CCC 1604-1605.)

3. How does sex fit into the order of the four harmonies that we talked about last week? What might be the result if it is not ordered rightly?

Response: Sex falls into the category of right relationship with others. Let the group discuss the consequences of sex that is not ordered rightly.

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

We talked about the four harmonies last week and the order of healthy relationships; similarly, romantic relationships have their own healthy inherent order. A healthy progression in a relationship begins with getting to know another person – their interests, their personality and their values and beliefs. This occurs through friendship and through dating. As the relationship progresses, it grows, with a deeper and deeper understanding of the other's longings and desires. At the altar during the sacrament of marriage, the couple commits

themselves to one another “until death do us part,” and they enter into a sacred covenant that cannot be broken. And finally, their love is consummated in the sexual embrace, making physical the spiritual reality of the covenant, that is, a total gift of self from one to the other.

Simply put, the stages of relational development move from sharing the mind, to the heart, to the soul in the sacrament of marriage, and finally to the body, in the sexual embrace. Too often, though, this order is completely reversed; and two people find themselves giving their bodies to one another a few months (or even moments) after meeting, saying with their bodies that they desire to make a total gift of self to one another, but coming nowhere close to saying that with their hearts, minds or souls. It is only within marriage, where the words and the actions of a “total gift of self” match one another, that sex is truly allowed to be what it was created to be.

4. What do you think of this natural progression of a relationship? How does this truly allow a romantic relationship and, eventually, a marriage, to be a “total gift of self”?

Response: Let the group discuss.

5. Why are we tempted to rush or distort the natural progression of a relationship? What are we most likely seeking?

Response: Let the group discuss. Prompt your group to think of the four motivations mentioned in the previous two chapters. Possible answers include:

Approval and Appreciation: “Having sex makes me feel wanted, loved, approved, and affirmed.”

Intimacy and Physical Comfort: “Sex makes me feel closer to him/

her” or “Looking at porn makes me feel less lonely” or “Having sex or looking at porn relieves my stress.”

Security and Control: “I think that having sex will make him/her stay with me.”

Influence and Power: “I feel powerful when I am able to sleep with multiple guys/girls” or “I like to give or withhold sex to get what I want.”

6. We discussed in Chapter 1 that we are created in God’s image and likeness, and we discussed in Chapter 2 that God as Trinity reveals to us that we are made to give and receive love. If the meaning of sex is a total gift of self to another person, what does that tell us about the nature of God?

Response: God is constantly giving us a total gift of himself at every moment, through grace. He also gives us a total gift of himself in the Eucharist, where he gave himself up completely and died on the cross so that we would be reconciled to God the Father. Sex is an earthly image of the divine nature of God’s complete and total love for us, holding nothing back.

(Read John 19:30)

“Consummatum est” is Latin for “it is consummated” or “it is finished.”

7. What do you think about that? How does Christ “consummating” himself to the cross influence your understanding of sex, and Christ and His Church?

Response: Let the group discuss.

Distortions of This Vision: Sexual Sin

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

As we've seen, God has a very intentional design for sex that is meant to teach us about the eternal love we are truly created for. However, we don't have to look very far around us to see that sex is constantly used and abused for our own selfish purposes, and that our culture even seeks to deny the very nature of sex as God designed it at every turn.

We see the abuses against this design everywhere: the pornography industry is a multi-billion-dollar industry; movies and TV shows promote the lie that promiscuity and casual sex are a normal part of life and are without consequences; divorce rates are over 50%, and committed lifelong marriages are seen as archaic or limiting to freedom. This culture affects us personally: encouraging us to turn to pornography and masturbation as solutions for our everyday ills, to treat sex as a way to embrace freedom or heal loneliness and to use other people on dating apps, through messaging, and even in person for our own selfish desires.

8. Why do you think hook-up culture, pornography and sexual sin are so popular and accepted in our world today, especially in Greek life on the college campus?

Response: Let the group discuss.

9. How has the hook-up culture, pornography, or the culture's attitudes about sex and relationships affected your own life or your relationships, or even your chapter?

Response: Let the group discuss. You may want to remind your group that they should share prudently but are free to open up about their own experience. Feel free to model appropriate sharing with a story of encountering this culture in your own life and how Jesus has invited you to greater freedom in chastity. Take note if abuse or assault gets brought up. Be sure to follow up with that student prudently and privately.

10. How might the world be different if society bought into God's vision for sex and relationships? What do you think would have to change in our culture for that to become a reality?

Response: Let the group discuss. Think about the common things that are justified in our culture: sex before marriage (even with someone you've been dating a long time), co-habitation (even if you're not having sex), or "just staying the night."

Encountering Hope in God's Vision for Sex

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

Though all of us likely endured effects of this broken vision of sex and relationships, we do not need to give up hope!

In Scripture, we can see how God beautifully lays out his plan for spousal, married love, and how it is meant to image his relationship with his Church (as read in John 19:30!). This is a lofty vision, and one that requires much grace to live out, but God reveals it to us as the way to true and lasting happiness and fulfillment.

(Read Eph. 5:21 – 33.)

11. What is striking to you about God's call to marriage, and modern culture's gender roles?

Response: Let the group discuss. Forward your participants to Chapter 1 of the "Theology of the Body" bible study for deeper insight here.

12. How do these verses rightly illustrate marriage and sex as a total gift of self?

Response: Let the group discuss. In particular, verse 25 describes Christ giving himself up for the Church, and verse 28 describes loving the other as you love yourself.

13. What does it mean to say the relationship between a man and a woman images Christ and his Church?

Response: By suffering and dying, Christ gave himself up completely for who he loved, which is the Church. Spouses are meant to die to themselves as he did out of love.

14. How can we live out this renewed vision for relationships *before* we are married? How could you begin preparing to live this way in your life today?

Response: Let the group discuss. Possible answers include: practicing giving of self and dying to self in small ways, particularly in friendships and dating relationships; loving our current families in a self-sacrificial way and choosing their good, etc.

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

Christ is inviting us to live more fully alive right now, whatever our personal situations may be. He does not wait for us to "be better" or to reach a certain level of holiness on our own to offer us grace and welcome us home; he offers it now and at every moment.

A Renewed Understanding of Sex: Greek Life Testimonies

(Note to leader: Feel free to read aloud or print these testimonies for your group to read and reflect upon, either during your study or outside of your study time.)

Male Testimony:

Coming from all-boys high school, I showed up on campus and was absolutely floored by the insane amount of gorgeous women everywhere. It was like being a young kid in an arcade: endless possibilities for pleasure. Shortly after showing up on campus, I began engaging in a non-committal sexual relationship. At first, I thought it was the dream – pleasure without responsibility. A month or two went by, and the pleasure had lost its luster; and I remember walking back from her dorm one night feeling so unbelievably empty. It was this feeling of emptiness that ended up bringing me to the place where I wanted to give God's plan for sexuality a try. The more I fell in love with God's view of sexuality, the less empty I felt. It was truly unbelievable.

Female Testimony:

I came into college with a wounded foundation. My experience with men and sexual sin had reached rock-bottom in high school, and I was really hoping to have a fresh start. Unfortunately, I wasn't strong enough to resist the party scene. Starting on bid day of my freshman year, I was back to my old habits. I lived

a life of toxic promiscuity, spending many nights partying and many mornings with an empty heart. Though I felt horrible, I persisted in my sin. From my perspective, I was good at being “bad.” My judgement was so clouded by sin that I couldn’t see a reason to change. As the years continued, I knew I wanted an out, but I was scared to seek it myself. A pledge sister of mine had the courage to ask me hard questions and offer accompaniment to see me through the change I deeply desired and needed. I was scared to fail in striving for chastity, but she believed in me. That made all the difference. I met Jesus, and his love was worth the sacrifice involved to make the change. I finally understood that I was made for more. I met love itself and couldn’t be the same. I was able to receive the abundant mercy of God and be restored in my innocence. I am forever grateful.

15. What is a next step you could take this week to live more fully alive in the area of relationships and sexual freedom? Who in your life could support you in taking that step?

Response: Let the group discuss. Consider following up with members of your group individually throughout the next week if they desire support and encouragement to grow in chastity. Check out the “Path to Freedom” (Men) and “Uncompromising Purity” (Women) resources on FOCUS Equip for help in accompanying someone in the journey to freedom.

(Note to leader: As a follow-up to the previous question, feel free to print this page as a resource to give your participants or to go over it as a group at the end of study).

Next Steps:

If you desire to live more fully alive in your relationships, there are a few steps you can begin to take as you begin this journey:

- **Go to confession.** God gave us the gift of the sacrament of confession to make peace with him, each other and ourselves. The sacrament reconciles us from the mortal sins that separate us from God and the Church and gives us grace to overcome future moments of temptation. If it’s been a while since you’ve gone to confession, find out when it’s available and try to go this week. If you’re not Catholic and/or would like a better understanding of what confession is, your study leader can get together with you and help you answer any questions you may have.
- **Set boundaries.** Jesus says in Scripture that if something causes you to sin sexually, root it out of your life (Matthew 5:27-30). This could mean getting rid of or setting limits on a book, your computer, the TV shows you watch, or even on the physical parts of your dating relationship, insofar as they are “near occasions of sin.” Setting these limits won’t cure you of temptation, but they will help keep you from feeding sinful desires and will make room for Jesus to fill you even more with his grace.
- **Find accountability.** Accountability is especially helpful with sexual sins, as what remains hidden will continue to have power over us, but what is brought to the light and surrendered to the Lord can be transformed. A priest or a trusted, virtuous friend who is living chastity well can be a tremendous aid. Consider finding someone you can check in with regularly as you pursue healing and growth in this area

who can help encourage you and celebrate your victories with you.

- **Pray.** St. Alphonsus Ligouri says, “Chastity is a virtue... Whoever prays for it will certainly attain it.” If you don’t pray regularly, begin to do so. Even ten minutes a day will allow the grace of Jesus to enter your life in new ways. When you pray, pray for the gift and the virtue of chastity, and listen to how Jesus might be guiding you to take steps to grow in exercising the virtue in your own life.



Chapter IV

Alcohol
